THREE SERMONS AND PRAYERS BY JONATHAN SWIFT

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ON MUTUAL SUBJECTION {1} - (First Printed in 1744)

"Yea, all of you be subject one to another." - I Peter v. 5

The Apostle having, in many parts of this Epistle, given directions to Christians concerning the duty of subjection or obedience to superiors, in the several instances of the subject to the prince, the child to his parent, the servant to his master, the wife to her husband, and the younger to the elder, doth here, in the words of my text, sum up the whole by advancing a point of doctrine, which at first may appear a little extraordinary. "Yea, all of you," saith he, "be subject one to another." For it should seem that two persons cannot properly be said to be subject to each other, and that subjection is only due from inferiors to those above them; yet St. Paul hath several passages to the same purpose. For he exhorts the Romans "in

honour to prefer one another;" and the Philippians, "that in lowliness of mind they should each esteem other better than themselves;" and the Ephesians, "that they should submit themselves one to another in the fear of the Lord." Here we find these two great Apostles recommending to all Christians this duty of mutual subjection. For we may observe, by St. Peter, that having mentioned the several relations which men bear to each other, as governor and subject, master and servant, and the rest which I have already repeated, he makes no exception, but sums up the whole with commanding "all to be subject one to another." Whence we may conclude that this subjection due from all men to all men is something more than the compliment of course, when our betters are pleased to tell us they are our humble servants, but understand us to be their slaves.

I know very well that some of those who explain this text apply it to humility, to the duties of charity, to private exhortations, and to bearing with each other's infirmities; and it is probable the Apostle may have had a regard to all these. But, however, many learned men agree that there is something more understood, and so the words in their plain natural meaning must import, as you will observe yourselves if you read them with the beginning of the verse, which is thus: "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder; yea, all of you be subject one to another." So that, upon the whole, there must be some kind of subjection due from every man to every man, which cannot be made void by any power, pre-eminence, or authority whatsoever. Now what sort of subjection this is, and how it ought to be paid, shall be the subject of my present discourse.

As God hath contrived all the works of Nature to be useful, and in some manner a support to each other, by which the whole frame of the world, under His providence, is preserved and kept up, so among mankind our particular stations are appointed to each of us by God Almighty, wherein we are obliged to act as far as our power reacheth toward the good of the whole community. And he who doth not perform that part assigned him towards advancing the benefit of the whole, in proportion to his opportunities and abilities, is not only a useless, but a very mischievous member of the public; because he takes his share of the profit, and yet leaves his share of the burden to be borne by others, which is the true

principal cause of most miseries and misfortunes in life. For a wise man who does not assist with his counsels, a great man with his protection, a rich man with his bounty and charity, and a poor man with his labour, are perfect nuisances in a commonwealth. Neither is any condition of life more honourable in the sight of God than another; otherwise He would be a respecter of persons, which He assures us He is not; for He hath proposed the same salvation to all men, and hath only placed them in different ways or stations to work it out. Princes are born with no more advantages of strength or wisdom than other men, and, by an unhappy education, are usually more defective in both than thousands of their subjects. They depend for every necessary of life upon the meanest of their people; besides, obedience and subjection were never enjoined by God to humour the passions, lusts, and vanities of those who demand them from us; but we are commanded to obey our governors, because disobedience would breed seditions in the state. Thus servants are directed to obey their masters, children their parents, and wives their husbands, not from any respect of persons in God, but because otherwise there would be nothing but confusion in private families. This matter will be clearly explained by considering the comparison which St. Paul makes between the Church of Christ and the body of man; for the same resemblance will hold not only to families and kingdoms, but to the whole corporation of mankind. "The eye," saith he, "cannot say unto the hand, 'I have no need of thee;' nor again the hand to the foot, 'I have no need of thee.' Nay, much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary; and whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." The case is directly the same among mankind. The prince cannot say to the merchant, "I have no need of thee," nor the merchant to the labourer, "I have no need of thee." Nay, much more those members which seem to be more feeble are necessary; for the poor are generally more necessary members of the commonwealth than the rich; which clearly shows that God never intended such possessions for the sake and service of those to whom He lends them, but because he hath assigned every man his particular station to be useful in life, and this for the reason given by the Apostle, "that there may be no schism in the body."

From hence may partly be gathered the nature of that subjection which we

all owe to one another. God Almighty hath been pleased to put us into an imperfect state, where we have perpetual occasion of each other's assistance. There is none so low as not to be in a capacity of assisting the highest, nor so high as not to want the assistance of the lowest.

It plainly appears, from what hath been said, that no one human creature is more worthy than another in the sight of God, further than according to the goodness or holiness of their lives; and that power, wealth, and the like outward advantages, are so far from being the marks of God's approving or preferring those on whom they are bestowed, that, on the contrary, He is pleased to suffer them to be almost engrossed by those who have least title to His favour. Now, according to this equality wherein God hath placed all mankind with relation to Himself, you will observe that in all the relations between man and man there is a mutual dependence, whereby the one cannot subsist without the other. Thus no man can be a prince without subjects, nor a master without servants, nor a father without children. And this both explains and confirms the doctrine of the text; for where there is a mutual dependence there must be a mutual duty, and consequently a mutual subjection. For instance, the subject must obey his prince, because God commands it, human laws require it, and the safety of the public makes it necessary; for the same reasons we must obey all that are in authority, and submit ourselves not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward, whether they rule according to our liking or not. On the other side, in those countries that pretend to freedom, princes are subject to those laws which their people have chosen; they are bound to protect their subjects in liberty, property, and religion, to receive their petitions and redress their grievances, so that the best prince is, in the opinion of wise men, only the greatest servant of the nation - not only a servant to the public in general, but in some sort to every man in it. In the like manner a servant owes obedience, and diligence, and faithfulness to his master, from whom, at the same time, he hath a just demand for protection, and maintenance, and gentle treatment. Nay, even the poor beggar hath a just demand of an alms from the rich man, who is guilty of fraud, injustice, and oppression if he does not afford relief according to his abilities.

But this subjection we all owe one another is nowhere more necessary than in the common conversations of life, for without it there could be no

society among men. If the learned would not sometimes submit to the ignorant, the wise to the simple, the gentle to the froward, the old to the weaknesses of the young, there would be nothing but everlasting variance in the world. This our Saviour Himself confirmed by His own example; for He appeared in the form of a servant and washed His disciples' feet, adding those memorable words, "Ye call me Lord and Master, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, wash your feet, how much more ought ye to wash one another's feet?" Under which expression of washing the feet is included all that subjection, assistance, love, and duty, which every good Christian ought to pay his brother, in whatever station God hath placed him. For the greatest prince and the meanest slave are not, by infinite degrees, so distant as our Saviour and those disciples, whose feet He vouchsafed to wash.

And although this doctrine of subjecting ourselves to one another may seem to grate upon the pride and vanity of mankind, and may therefore be hard to be digested by those who value themselves upon their greatness or their wealth, yet it is really no more than what most men practise upon other occasions. For if our neighbour, who is our inferior, comes to see us, we rise to receive him; we place him above us, and respect him as if he were better than ourselves; and this is thought both decent and necessary, and is usually called good manners. Now the duty required by the Apostle is only that we should enlarge our minds, and that what we thus practise in the common course of life we should imitate in all our actions and proceedings whatsoever; since our Saviour tells us that every man is our neighbour, and since we are so ready, in point of civility, to yield to others in our own houses, where only we have any title to govern.

Having thus shown you what sort of subjection it is which all men owe one another, and in what manner it ought to be paid, I shall now draw some observations from what hath been said.

And first, a thorough practice of this duty of subjecting ourselves to the wants and infirmities of each other would utterly extinguish in us the vice of pride.

For if God has pleased to intrust me with a talent, not for my own sake, but

for the service of others, and at the same time hath left me full of wants and necessities which others must supply, I can then have no cause to set any extraordinary value upon myself, or to despise my brother because he hath not the same talents which were lent to me. His being may probably be as useful to the public as mine; and therefore, by the rules of right reason, I am in no sort preferable to him.

Secondly, It is very manifest, from what has been said, that no man ought to look upon the advantages of life, such as riches, honour, power, and the like, as his property, but merely as a trust which God hath deposited with him to be employed for the use of his brethren, and God will certainly punish the breach of that trust, though the laws of man will not, or rather indeed cannot; because the trust was conferred only by God, who has not left it to any power on earth to decide infallibly whether a man makes a good use of his talents or not, or to punish him where he fails. And therefore God seems to have more particularly taken this matter into His own hands, and will most certainly reward or punish us in proportion to our good or ill performance in it. Now, although the advantages which one possesseth more than another may, in some sense, be called his property with respect to other men, yet with respect to God they are, as I said, only a trust, which will plainly appear from hence: if a man does not use those advantages to the good of the public or the benefit of his neighbour, it is certain he doth not deserve them, and consequently that God never intended them for a blessing to him; and on the other side, whoever does employ his talents as he ought will find, by his own experience, that they were chiefly lent him for the service of others, for to the service of others he will certainly employ them.

Thirdly, If we could all be brought to practise this duty of subjecting ourselves to each other, it would very much contribute to the general happiness of mankind, for this would root out envy and malice from the heart of man; because you cannot envy your neighbour's strength if he make use of it to defend your life or carry your burden; you cannot envy his wisdom if he gives you good counsel; nor his riches if he supplies your wants; nor his greatness if he employs it to your protection. The miseries of life are not properly owing to the unequal distribution of things, but God Almighty, the great King of heaven, is treated like the kings of the

earth, who, although perhaps intending well themselves, have often most abominable ministers and stewards, and those generally the vilest to whom they intrust the most talents. But here is the difference, that the princes of this world see by other men's eyes, but God sees all things; and therefore, whenever He permits His blessings to be dealt among those who are unworthy, we may certainly conclude that He intends them only as a punishment to an evil world, as well as to the owners. It were well if those would consider this, whose riches serve them only as a spur to avarice or as an instrument of their lusts; whose wisdom is only of this world, to put false colours upon things, to call good evil and evil good against the conviction of their own consciences; and lastly, who employ their power and favour in acts of oppression or injustice, in misrepresenting persons and things, or in countenancing the wicked to the ruin of the innocent.

Fourthly, The practice of this duty of being subject to one another would make us rest contented in the several stations of life wherein God hath thought fit to place us, because it would, in the best and easiest manner, bring us back, as it were, to that early state of the Gospel when Christians had all things in common. For if the poor found the rich disposed to supply their want, if the ignorant found the wise ready to instruct and direct them, or if the weak might always find protection from the mighty, they could none of them, with the least pretence of justice, lament their own condition.

From all that hath been hitherto said it appears that great abilities of any sort, when they are employed as God directs, do but make the owners of them greater and more painful servants to their neighbour and the public. However, we are by no means to conclude from hence that they are not really blessings, when they are in the hands of good men. For, first, what can be a greater honour than to be chosen one of the stewards and dispensers of God's bounty to mankind? What is there that can give a generous spirit more pleasure and complacency of mind than to consider that he is an instrument of doing much good; that great numbers owe to him, under God, their subsistence, their safety, their health, and the good conduct of their lives? The wickedest man upon earth takes a pleasure in doing good to those he loves; and therefore surely a good Christian, who obeys our Saviour's commands of loving all men, cannot but take delight

in doing good even to his enemies. God, who gives all things to all men, can receive nothing from any; and those among men who do the most good and receive the fewest returns do most resemble the Creator; for which reason St. Paul delivers it as a saying of our Saviour, that "it is more blessed to give than receive." By this rule, what must become of those things which the world values as the greatest blessings - riches, power, and the like - when our Saviour plainly determines that the best way to make them blessings is to part with them? Therefore, although the advantages which one man hath over another may be called blessings, yet they are by no means so in the sense the world usually understands. Thus, for example, great riches are no blessings in themselves, because the poor man, with the common necessaries of life, enjoys more health and has fewer cares without them. How then do they become blessings? No otherwise than by being employed in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, rewarding worthy men, and, in short, doing acts of charity and generosity. Thus, likewise, power is no blessing in itself, because private men bear less envy, and trouble, and anguish without it. But when it is employed to protect the innocent, to relieve the oppressed, and to punish the oppressor, then it becomes a great blessing.

And so, lastly, even great wisdom is, in the opinion of Solomon, not a blessing in itself; for "in much wisdom is much sorrow;" and men of common understanding, if they serve God and mind their callings, make fewer mistakes in the conduct of life than those who have better heads. And yet wisdom is a mighty blessing when it is applied to good purposes, to instruct the ignorant, to be a faithful counsellor either in public or private, to be a director to youth, and to many other ends needless here to mention.

To conclude: God sent us into the world to obey His commands, by doing as much good as our abilities will reach, and as little evil as our many infirmities will permit. Some He hath only trusted with one talent, some with five, and some with ten. No man is without his talent; and he that is faithful or negligent in a little shall be rewarded or punished, as well as he that hath been so in a great deal.

Consider what hath been said, &c.

ON SLEEPING IN CHURCH

"And there sat in the window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and while Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." - Acts xx. 9.

I have chosen these words with design, if possible, to disturb some part in this audience of half an hour's sleep, for the convenience and exercise whereof this place, at this season of the day, is very much celebrated.

There is indeed one mortal disadvantage to which all preaching is subject, that those who, by the wickedness of their lives, stand in greatest need, have usually the smallest share; for either they are absent upon the account of idleness, or spleen, or hatred to religion, or in order to doze away the intemperance of the week; or, if they do come, they are sure to employ their minds rather any other way than regarding or attending to the business of the place.

The accident which happened to this young man in the text hath not been sufficient to discourage his successors; but because the preachers now in the world, however they may exceed St. Paul in the art of setting men to sleep, do extremely fall short of him in the working of miracles, therefore men are become so cautious as, to choose more safe and convenient stations and postures for taking their repose without hazard of their persons, and upon the whole matter choose rather to trust their destruction to a miracle than their safety. However, this being not the only way by which the lukewarm Christians and scorners of the age discover their neglect and contempt of preaching, I shall enter expressly into consideration of this matter, and order my discourse in the following method:-

First, I shall produce several instances to show the great neglect of preaching now among us.

Secondly, I shall reckon up some of the usual quarrels men have against preaching.

Thirdly, I shall get forth the great evil of this neglect and contempt of preaching, and discover the real causes whence it proceedeth.

Lastly, I shall offer some remedies against this great and spreading evil.

First, I shall produce certain instances to show the great neglect of preaching now among us.

These may be reduced under two heads. First, men's absence from the service of the church; and secondly, their misbehaviour when they are here.

The first instance of men's neglect is in their frequent absence from the church.

There is no excuse so trivial that will not pass upon some men's consciences to excuse their attendance at the public worship of God. Some are so unfortunate as to be always indisposed on the Lord's day, and think nothing so unwholesome as the air of a church. Others have their affairs so oddly contrived as to be always unluckily prevented by business. With some it is a great mark of wit and deep understanding to stay at home on Sundays. Others again discover strange fits of laziness, that seize them particularly on that day, and confine them to their beds. Others are absent out of mere contempt of religion. And lastly, there are not a few who look upon it as a day of rest, and therefore claim the privilege of their cattle, to keep the Sabbath by eating, drinking, and sleeping, after the toil and labour of the week. Now in all this, the worst circumstance is that these persons are such whose company is most required, and who stand most in need of a physician.

Secondly, Men's great neglect and contempt of preaching appear by their

misbehaviour when at church.

If the audience were to be ranked under several heads, according to their behaviour when the Word of God is delivered, how small a number would appear of those who receive it as they ought! How much of the seed then sown would be found to fall by the wayside, upon stony ground, or among thorns! and how little good ground would there be to take it! A preacher cannot look round from the pulpit without observing that some are in a perpetual whisper, and by their air and gesture give occasion to suspect that they are in those very minutes defaming their neighbour. Others have their eyes and imagination constantly engaged in such a circle of objects, perhaps to gratify the most unwarrantable desires, that they never once attend to the business of the place; the sound of the preacher's words do not so much as once interrupt them. Some have their minds wandering among idle, worldly, or vicious thoughts; some lie at catch to ridicule whatever they hear, and with much wit and humour, provide a stock of laughter by furnishing themselves from the pulpit. But of all misbehaviour, none is comparable to that of those who come here to sleep. Opium is not so stupefying to many persons as an afternoon sermon. Perpetual custom hath so brought it about that the words of whatever preacher become only a sort of uniform sound at a distance, than which nothing is more effectual to lull the senses. For that it is the very sound of the sermon which bindeth up their faculties is manifest from hence, because they all awake so very regularly as soon as it ceaseth, and with much devotion receive the blessing, dozed and besotted with indecencies I am ashamed to repeat.

I proceed, *secondly*, to reckon up some of the usual quarrels men have against preaching, and to show the unreasonableness of them.

Such unwarrantable behaviour as I have described among Christians in the house of God in a solemn assembly, while their faith and duty are explained and delivered, have put those who are guilty upon inventing some excuses to extenuate their fault; this they do by turning the blame either upon the particular preacher or upon preaching in general. First, they object against the particular preacher: his manner, his delivery, his

voice, are disagreeable; his style and expression are flat and slow, sometimes improper and absurd; the matter is heavy, trivial, and insipid, sometimes despicable and perfectly ridiculous; or else, on the other side, he runs up into unintelligible speculation, empty notions, and abstracted flights, all clad in words above usual understandings.

Secondly, They object against preaching in general. It is a perfect road of talk; they know already whatever can be said; they have heard the same a hundred times over. They quarrel that preachers do not relieve an old beaten subject with wit and invention, and that now the art is lost of moving men's passions, so common among the ancient orators of Greece and Rome. These and the like objections are frequently in the mouths of men who despise the foolishness of preaching. But let us examine the reasonableness of them.

The doctrine delivered by all preachers is the same: "So we preach, and so ye believe." But the manner of delivering is suited to the skill and abilities of each, which differ in preachers just as in the rest of mankind. However, in personal dislikes of a particular preacher, are these men sure they are always in the right? Do they consider how mixed a thing is every audience, whose taste and judgment differ, perhaps, every day, not only from each other, but themselves? And how to calculate a discourse that shall exactly suit them all, is beyond the force and reach of human reason, knowledge, or invention. Wit and eloquence are shining qualities that God hath imparted in great degrees to very few, nor any more to be expected in the generality of any rank among men than riches and honour. But further, if preaching in general be all old and beaten, and that they are already so well acquainted with it, more shame and guilt to them who so little edify by it! But these men, whose ears are so delicate as not to endure a plain discourse of religion, who expect a constant supply of wit and eloquence on a subject handled so many thousand times, what will they say when we turn the objection upon themselves, who, with all the rude and profane liberty of discourse they take upon so many thousand subjects, are so dull as to furnish nothing but tedious repetitions, and little paltry, nauseous commonplaces, so vulgar, so worn, or so obvious, as, upon any other occasion but that of advancing vice, would be hooted off the stage? Nor, lastly, are preachers justly blamed for neglecting human oratory to move

the passions, which is not the business of a Christian orator, whose office it is only to work upon faith and reason. All other eloquence hath been a perfect cheat, to stir up men's passions against truth and justice for the service of a faction, to put false colours upon things, and, by an amusement of agreeable words, make the worst reason appear to be the better. This is certainly not to be allowed in Christian eloquence, and therefore St. Paul took quite the other course. He "came not with the excellency of words, or enticing speech of men's wisdom, but in plain evidence of the Spirit and power." And perhaps it was for that reason the young man Eutychus, used to the Grecian eloquence, grew tired and fell so fast asleep.

I go on, thirdly, to set forth the great evil of this neglect and scorn of preaching, and to discover the real causes whence it proceedeth.

I think it is obvious that this neglect of preaching hath very much occasioned the great decay of religion among us. To this may be imputed no small part of that contempt some men bestow on the clergy, for whoever talketh without being regarded is sure to be despised. To this we owe in a great measure the spreading of atheism and infidelity among us, for religion, like all other things, is soonest put out of countenance by being ridiculed. The scorn of preaching might perhaps have been at first introduced by men of nice ears and refined taste, but it is now become a spreading evil through all degrees and both sexes; for, since sleeping, talking, and laughing are qualities sufficient to furnish out a critic, the meanest and most ignorant have set up a title, and succeeded in it as well as their betters. Thus are the last efforts of reforming mankind rendered wholly useless. "How shall they hear," saith the Apostle, "without a preacher?" But if they have a preacher, and make it a point of wit or breeding not to hear him, what remedy is left? To this neglect of preaching we may also entirely impute that gross ignorance among us in the very principles of religion, which it is amazing to find in persons who very much value their own knowledge and understanding in other things; yet it is a visible, inexcusable ignorance, even in the meanest among us, considering the many advantages they have of learning their duty. And it hath been the great encouragement to all manner of vice; for in vain we

preach down sin to a people “whose hearts are waxed gross, whose ears are dull of hearing and whose eyes are closed.” Therefore Christ Himself in His discourses frequently rouseth up the attention of the multitude, and of His disciples themselves, with this expression, “He that hath ears to hear let him hear.” But among all neglects of preaching, none is so fatal as that of sleeping in the house of God. A scorner may listen to truth and reason, and in time grow serious; an unbeliever may feel the pangs of a guilty conscience; one whose thoughts or eyes wander among other objects may, by a lucky word, be called back to attention; but the sleeper shuts up all avenues to his soul; he is “like the deaf adder, that hearkeneth not to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely;” and we may preach with as good success to the grave that is under his feet.

But the great evil of this neglect will further yet appear from considering the real causes whence it proceedeth, whereof the first I take to be an evil conscience. Many men come to church to save or gain a reputation, or because they will not be singular, but comply with an established custom, yet all the while they are loaded with the guilt of old rooted sins. These men can expect to hear of nothing but terrors and threatenings, their sins laid open in true colours, and eternal misery the reward of them; therefore, no wonder they stop their care and divert their thoughts, and seek any amusement rather than stir the hell within them.

Another cause of this neglect is a heart set upon worldly things. Men whose minds are much enslaved to earthly affairs all the week cannot disengage or break the chain of their thoughts so suddenly as to apply to a discourse that is wholly foreign to what they have most at heart. Tell a usurer of charity, and mercy, and restitution - you talk to the deaf; his heart and soul, with all his senses, are got among his bags, or he is gravely asleep and dreaming of a mortgage. Tell a man of business, that the cares of the world choke the good seed; that we must not encumber ourselves with much serving; that the salvation of his soul is the one thing necessary; you see, indeed, the shape of a man before you, but his faculties are all gone off among clients and papers, thinking how to defend a bad cause or find flaws in a good one; or he weareth out the time in drowsy nods.

A third cause of the great neglect and scorn of preaching ariseth from the practice of men who set up to decry and disparage religion; these, being zealous to promote infidelity and vice, learn a rote of buffoonery that serveth all occasions, and refutes the strongest arguments for piety and good manners. These have a set of ridicule calculated for all sermons and all preachers, and can be extremely witty as often as they please upon the same fund.

Let me now, in the last place, offer some remedies against this great evil.

It will be one remedy against the contempt of preaching rightly to consider the end for which it was designed. There are many who place abundance of merit in going to church, although it be with no other prospect but that of being well entertained, wherein if they happen to fail, they return wholly disappointed. Hence it is become an impertinent vein among people of all sorts to hunt after what they call a good sermon, as if it were a matter of pastime and diversion. Our business, alas! is quite another thing; either to learn, or at least be reminded of, our duty; to apply the doctrines delivered, compare the rules we hear with our lives and actions, and find wherein we have transgressed. These are the dispositions men should bring into the house of God, and then they will be little concerned about the preacher's wit or eloquence, nor be curious to inquire out his faults and infirmities, but consider how to correct their own.

Another remedy against the contempt of preaching is that men would consider whether it be not reasonable to give more allowance for the different abilities of preachers than they usually do. Refinements of style and flights of wit, as they are not properly the business of any preacher, so they cannot possibly be the talents of all. In most other discourses, men are satisfied with sober sense and plain reason; and, as understandings usually go, even that is not over-frequent. Then why they should be so over-nice in expectation of eloquence, where it is neither necessary nor convenient, is hard to imagine.

Lastly, The scorners of preaching would do well to consider that this talent of ridicule they value so much is a perfection very easily acquired, and applied to all things whatsoever; neither is anything at all the worse

because it is capable of being perverted to burlesque; perhaps it may be the more perfect upon that score, since we know the most celebrated pieces have been thus treated with greatest success. It is in any man's power to suppose a fool's-cap on the wisest head, and then laugh at his own supposition. I think there are not many things cheaper than supposing and laughing; and if the uniting these two talents can bring a thing into contempt, it is hard to know where it may end.

To conclude: These considerations may perhaps have some effect while men are awake; but what arguments shall we use to the sleeper? What methods shall we take to hold open his eyes? Will he be moved by considerations of common civility? We know it is reckoned a point of very bad manners to sleep in private company, when, perhaps, the tedious impertinence of many talkers would render it at least as excusable as the dullest sermon. Do they think it a small thing to watch four hours at a play, where all virtue and religion are openly reviled; and can they not watch one half hour to hear them defended? Is this to deal like a judge (I mean like a good judge), to listen on one side of the cause and sleep on the other? I shall add but one word more. That this indecent sloth is very much owing to that luxury and excess men usually practise upon this day, by which half the service thereof is turned to sin; men dividing their time between God and their bellies, when, after a gluttonous meal, their senses dozed and stupefied, they retire to God's house to sleep out the afternoon. Surely, brethren, these things ought not so to be.

"He that hath ears to hear let him hear." And God give us all, grace to hear and receive His Holy Word to the salvation of our own souls.

ON THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD

"The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." - I Cor. iii. 19.

It is remarkable that about the time of our Saviour's coming into the world

all kinds of learning flourished to a very great degree, insomuch that nothing is more frequent in the mouths of many men, even such who pretend to read and to know, than an extravagant praise and opinion of the wisdom and virtue of the Gentile sages of those days, and likewise of those ancient philosophers who went before them, whose doctrines are left upon record, either by themselves or other writers. As far as this may be taken for granted, it may be said that the providence of God brought this about for several very wise ends and purposes; for it is certain that these philosophers had been a long time before searching out where to fix the true happiness of man; and not being able to agree upon any certainty about it, they could not possibly but conclude, if they judged impartially, that all their inquiries were in the end but vain and fruitless, the consequence of which must be not only an acknowledgment of the weakness of all human wisdom, but likewise an open passage hereby made for letting in those beams of light which the glorious sunshine of the Gospel then brought into the world, by revealing those hidden truths which they had so long before been labouring to discover, and fixing the general happiness of mankind beyond all controversy and dispute. And therefore the providence of God wisely suffered men of deep genius and learning then to arise, who should search into the truth of the Gospel now made known, and canvass its doctrines with all the subtilty and knowledge they were masters of, and in the end freely acknowledge that to be the true wisdom only "which cometh from above."

However, to make a further inquiry into the truth of this observation, I doubt not but there is reason to think that a great many of those encomiums given to ancient philosophers are taken upon trust, and by a sort of men who are not very likely to be at the pains of an inquiry that would employ so much time and thinking. For the usual ends why men affect this kind of discourse appear generally to be either out of ostentation, that they may pass upon the world for persons of great knowledge and observation, or, what is worse, there are some who highly exalt the wisdom of those Gentile sages, thereby obliquely to glance at and traduce Divine revelation, and more especially that of the Gospel; for the consequence they would have us draw is this: that since those ancient philosophers rose to a greater pitch of wisdom and virtue than was ever known among Christians, and all this purely upon the strength of their own

reason and liberty of thinking; therefore it must follow that either all revelation is false, or, what is worse, that it has depraved the nature of man, and left him worse than it found him.

But this high opinion of heathen wisdom is not very ancient in the world, nor at all countenanced from primitive times. Our Saviour had but a low esteem of it, as appears by His treatment of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who followed the doctrines of Plato and Epicurus. St. Paul likewise, who was well versed in all the Grecian literature, seems very much to despise their philosophy, as we find in his writings, cautioning the Colossians to "beware lest any man spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit;" and in another place he advises Timothy to "avoid profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called;" that is, not to introduce into the Christian doctrine the janglings of those vain philosophers, which they would pass upon the world for science. And the reasons he gives are, first, that those who professed them did err concerning the faith; secondly, because the knowledge of them did increase ungodliness, vain babblings being otherwise expounded vanities or empty sounds; that is, tedious disputes about words, which the philosophers were always so full of, and which were the natural product of disputes and dissensions between several sects.

Neither had the primitive fathers any great or good opinion of the heathen philosophy, as is manifest from several passages in their writings; so that this vein of affecting to raise the reputation of those sages so high Is a mode and a vice but of yesterday, assumed chiefly, as I have said, to disparage revealed knowledge and the consequences of it among us.

Now, because this is a prejudice which may prevail with some persons so far as to lessen the influence of the Gospel, and whereas, therefore, this is an opinion which men of education are likely to be encountered with when they have produced themselves into the world, I shall endeavour to show that their preference of heathen wisdom and virtue before that of the Christian is every way unjust, and grounded upon ignorance or mistake; in order to which I shall consider four things:-

First, I shall produce certain points wherein the wisdom and virtue of all

unrevealed philosophy in general fell short and was very imperfect.

Secondly, I shall show, in several instances, where some of the most renowned philosophers have been grossly defective in their lessons of morality.

Thirdly, I shall prove the perfection of Christian wisdom from the proper characters and marks of it.

Lastly, I shall show that the great examples of wisdom and virtue among the heathen wise men were produced by personal merit, and not influenced by the doctrine of any sect; whereas, in Christianity, it is quite the contrary.

First, I shall produce certain points wherein the wisdom and virtue of all unrevealed philosophy in general fell short and was very imperfect.

My design is to persuade men that Christian philosophy is in all things preferable to heathen wisdom; from which, or its professors, I shall, however, have no occasion to detract. They were as wise and as good as it was possible for them to be under such disadvantages, and would have probably been infinitely more so with such aids as we enjoy; but our lessons are certainly much better, however our practices may fall short.

The first point I shall mention is that universal defect which was in all their schemes, that they could not agree about their chief good, or wherein to place the happiness of mankind; nor had any of them a tolerable answer upon this difficulty to satisfy a reasonable person. For to say, as the most plausible of them did, “That happiness consisted in virtue,” was but vain babbling, and a mere sound of words to amuse others and themselves; because they were not agreed what this virtue was or wherein it did consist; and likewise, because several among the best of them taught quite different things, placing happiness in health or good fortune, in riches or in honour, where all were agreed that virtue was not, as I shall have occasion to show when I speak of their particular tenets.

The second great defect in the Gentile philosophy was that it wanted some

suitable reward proportioned to the better part of man - his mind, as an encouragement for his progress in virtue. The difficulties they met with upon the score of this default were great, and not to be accounted for; bodily goods, being only suitable to bodily wants, are no rest at all for the mind; and if they were, yet are they not the proper fruits of wisdom and virtue, being equally attainable by the ignorant and wicked. Now human nature is so constituted that we can never pursue anything heartily but upon hopes of a reward. If we run a race, it is in expectation of a prize; and the greater the prize the faster we run; for an incorruptible crown, if we understand it and believe it to be such, more than a corruptible one. But some of the philosophers gave all this quite another turn, and pretended to refine so far as to call virtue its own reward, and worthy to be followed only for itself; whereas, if there be anything in this more than the sound of the words, it is at least too abstracted to become a universal influencing principle in the world, and therefore could not be of general use.

It was the want of assigning some happiness proportioned to the soul of man that caused many of them, either on the one hand, to be sour and morose, supercilious and untreatable, or, on the other, to fall into the vulgar pursuits of common men, to hunt after greatness and riches, to make their court and to serve occasions, as Plato did to the younger Dionysius, and Aristotle to Alexander the Great. So impossible it is for a man who looks no further than the present world to fix himself long in a contemplation where the present world has no part; he has no sure hold, no firm footing; he can never expect to remove the earth he rests upon while he has no support besides for his feet, but wants, like Archimedes, some other place whereon to stand. To talk of bearing pain and grief without any sort of present or future hope cannot be purely greatness of spirit; there must be a mixture in it of affectation and an alloy of pride, or perhaps is wholly counterfeit.

It is true there has been all along in the world a notion of rewards and punishments in another life, but it seems to have rather served as an entertainment to poets or as a terror of children than a settled principle by which men pretended to govern any of their actions. The last celebrated words of Socrates, a little before his death, do not seem to reckon or build

much upon any such opinion; and Caesar made no scruple to disown it and ridicule it in open senate.

Thirdly, the greatest and wisest of all their philosophers were never able to give any satisfaction to others and themselves in their notions of a deity. They were often extremely gross and absurd in their conceptions, and those who made the fairest conjectures are such as were generally allowed by the learned to have seen the system of Moses, if I may so call it, who was in great reputation at that time in the heathen world, as we find by Diodorus, Justin, Longinus, and other authors; for the rest, the wisest among them laid aside all notions after a deity as a disquisition vain and fruitless, which indeed it was upon unrevealed principles; and those who ventured to engage too far fell into incoherence and confusion.

Fourthly, Those among them who had the justest conceptions of a Divine power, and did also admit a providence, had no notion at all of entirely relying and depending upon either; they trusted in themselves for all things, but as for a trust or dependence upon God, they would not have understood the phrase; it made no part of the profane style.

Therefore it was that, in all issues and events which they could not reconcile to their own sentiments of reason and justice, they were quite disconcerted; they had no retreat, but upon every blow of adverse fortune, either affected to be indifferent, or grew sullen and severe, or else yielded and sunk like other men.

Having now produced certain points wherein the wisdom and virtue of all unrevealed philosophy fell short and was very imperfect, I go on, in the second place, to show, in several instances, where some of the most renowned philosophers have been grossly defective in their lessons of morality.

Thales, the founder of the Ionic sect, so celebrated for morality, being asked how a man might bear ill-fortune with greatest ease, answered, “By seeing his enemies in a worse condition.” An answer truly barbarous, unworthy of human nature, and which included such consequences as must

destroy all society from the world.

Solon lamenting the death of a son, one told him, “You lament in vain.” “Therefore,” said he, “I lament, because it is in vain.” This was a plain confession how imperfect all his philosophy was, and that something was still wanting. He owned that all his wisdom and morals were useless, and this upon one of the most frequent accidents in life. How much better could he have learned to support himself even from David, by his entire dependence upon God, and that before our Saviour had advanced the notions of religion to the height and perfection wherewith He hath instructed His disciples!

Plato himself, with all his refinements, placed happiness in wisdom, health, good fortune, honour, and riches, and held that they who enjoyed all these were perfectly happy; which opinion was indeed unworthy its owner, leaving the wise and good man wholly at the mercy of uncertain chance, and to be miserable without resource.

His scholar Aristotle fell more grossly into the same notion, and plainly affirmed, “That virtue, without the goods of fortune, was not sufficient for happiness, but that a wise man must be miserable in poverty and sickness.” Nay, Diogenes himself, from whose pride and singularity one would have looked for other notions, delivered it as his opinion, “That a poor old man was the most miserable thing in life.”

Zeno also and his followers fell into many absurdities, among which nothing could be greater than that of maintaining all crimes to be equal; which, instead of making vice hateful, rendered it as a thing indifferent and familiar to all men.

Lastly, Epicurus had no notion of justice but as it was profitable; and his placing happiness in pleasure, with all the advantages he could expound it by, was liable to very great exception; for although he taught that pleasure did consist in virtue, yet he did not any way fix or ascertain the boundaries of virtue, as he ought to have done; by which means he misled his followers into the greatest vices, making their names to become odious and scandalous even in the heathen world.

I have produced these few instances from a great many others to show the imperfection of heathen philosophy, wherein I have confined myself wholly to their morality. And surely we may pronounce upon it, in the words of St. James, that "This wisdom descended not from above, but was earthly and sensual." What if I had produced their absurd notions about God and the soul? It would then have completed the character given it by that Apostle, and appeared to have been devilish too. But it is easy to observe from the nature of these few particulars that their defects in morals were purely the flagging and fainting of the mind for want of a support by revelation from God.

I proceed, therefore, in the *third* place, to show the perfection of Christian wisdom from above; and I shall endeavour to make it appear from those proper characters and marks of it by the Apostle before mentioned, in the third chapter, and 15th, 16th, and 17th verses.

The words run thus -

"This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

"The wisdom from above is first pure." This purity of the mind and spirit is peculiar to the Gospel. Our Saviour says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." A mind free from all pollution of lusts shall have a daily vision of God, whereof unrevealed religion can form no notion. This is it that keeps us unspotted from the world, and hereby many have been prevailed upon to live in the practice of all purity, holiness, and righteousness, far beyond the examples of the most celebrated philosophers.

It is “peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated.” The Christian doctrine teacheth us all those dispositions that make us affable and courteous, gentle and kind, without any morose leaven of pride or vanity, which entered into the composition of most heathen schemes: so we are taught to be meek and lowly. Our Saviour’s last legacy was peace, and He commands us to forgive our offending brother unto seventy times seven. Christian wisdom is full of mercy and good works, teaching the height of all moral virtues, of which the heathens fell infinitely short. Plato indeed (and it is worth observing) has somewhere a dialogue, or part of one, about forgiving our enemies, which was perhaps the highest strain ever reached by man without Divine assistance; yet how little is that to what our Saviour commands us, “To love them that hate us, to bless them that curse us, and to do good to them that despitefully use us.”

Christian wisdom is “without partiality;” it is not calculated for this or that nation of people, but the whole race of mankind. Not so the philosophical schemes, which were narrow and confined, adapted to their peculiar towns, governments, or sects; but “in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him.”

Lastly, It is “without hypocrisy;” it appears to be what it really is; it is all of a piece. By the doctrines of the Gospel we are so far from being allowed to publish to the world those virtues we have not, that we are commanded to hide even from ourselves those we really have, and not to let our right hand know what our left hand does, unlike several branches of the heathen wisdom, which pretended to teach insensibility and indifference, magnanimity and contempt of life, while at the same time, in other parts, it belied its own doctrines.

I come now, in the last place, to show that the great examples of wisdom and virtue among the Grecian sages were produced by personal merit; and not influenced by the doctrine of any particular sect, whereas in Christianity it is quite the contrary.

The two virtues most celebrated by ancient moralists were fortitude and temperance, as relating to the government of man in his private capacity, to which their schemes were generally addressed and confined, and the

two instances wherein those virtues arrived at the greatest height were Socrates and Cato. But neither these, nor any other virtues possessed by these two, were at all owing to any lessons or doctrines of a sect. For Socrates himself was of none at all; and although Cato was called a Stoic, it was more from a resemblance of manners in his worst qualities, than that he avowed himself one of their disciples. The same may be affirmed of many other great men of antiquity. Whence I infer that those who were renowned for virtue among them were more obliged to the good natural dispositions of their own minds than to the doctrines of any sect they pretended to follow.

On the other side, as the examples of fortitude and patience among the primitive Christians have been infinitely greater, and more numerous, so they were altogether the product of their principles and doctrine, and were such as the same persons, without those aids, would never have arrived to. Of this truth most of the Apostles, with many thousand martyrs, are a cloud of witnesses beyond exception. Having, therefore, spoken so largely upon the former heads, I shall dwell no longer upon this.

And if it should here be objected, Why does not Christianity still produce the same effects? it is easy to answer, first, that, although the number of pretended Christians be great, yet that of true believers, in proportion to the other, was never so small; and it is a true lively faith alone that, by the assistance of God's grace, can influence our practice.

Secondly, We may answer that Christianity itself has very much suffered by being blended up with Gentile philosophy. The Platonic system, first taken into religion, was thought to have given matter for some early heresies in the Church. When disputes began to arise, the Peripatetic forms were introduced by Scotus as best fitted for controversy. And however this may now have become necessary, it was surely the author of a litigious vein, which has since occasioned very pernicious consequences, stopped the progress of Christianity, and been a great promoter of vice; verifying that sentence given by St. James, and mentioned before, "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." This was the fatal stop to the Grecians in their progress both of arts and arms; their wise men were divided under several sects, and their governments under

several commonwealths, all in opposition to each other, which engaged them in eternal quarrels among themselves, while they should have been armed against the common enemy. And I wish we had no other examples, from the like causes, less foreign or ancient than that. Diogenes said Socrates was a madman; the disciples of Zeno and Epicurus, nay, of Plato and Aristotle, were engaged in fierce disputes about the most insignificant trifles. And if this be the present language and practice among us Christians no wonder that Christianity does not still produce the same effects which it did at first, when it was received and embraced in its utmost purity and perfection; for such wisdom as this cannot "descend from above," but must be "earthly, sensual, devilish, full of confusion and every evil work," whereas, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." This is the true heavenly wisdom, which Christianity only can boast of, and which the greatest of the heathen wise men could never arrive at.

Now to God the Father, &c.

THREE PRAYERS USED BY THE DEAN FOR STELLA IN HER LAST SICKNESS, 1727

I.

Almighty and most gracious Lord God, extend, we beseech Thee, Thy pity and compassion toward this Thy languishing servant; teach her to place her hope and confidence entirely in Thee; give her a true sense of the emptiness and vanity of all earthly things; make her truly sensible of all the infirmities of her life past, and grant to her such a true sincere repentance as is not to be repented of. Preserve her, O Lord, in a sound mind and understanding during this Thy visitation; keep her from both the sad extremes of presumption and despair. If Thou shalt please to restore her to her former health, give her grace to be ever mindful of that mercy,

and to keep those good resolutions she now makes in her sickness, so that no length of time nor prosperity may entice her to forget them. Let no thought of her misfortunes distract her mind, and prevent the means toward her recovery, or disturb her in her preparations for a better life. We beseech thee also, O Lord, of Thy infinite goodness, to remember the good actions of this Thy servant; that the naked she hath clothed, the hungry she hath fed, the sick and the fatherless whom she hath relieved, may be reckoned according to Thy gracious promise, as if they had been done unto Thee. Hearken, O Lord, to the prayers offered up by the friends of this Thy servant in her behalf, and especially those now made by us unto thee. Give Thy blessing to those endeavours used for her recovery; but take from her all violent desire either of life or death, further than with resignation to Thy holy will. And now, O Lord, we implore Thy gracious favour toward us here met together. Grant that the sense of this Thy servant's weakness may add strength to our faith; that we, considering the infirmities of our nature and the uncertainty of life, may by this example be drawn to repentance before it shall please Thee to visit us in like manner. Accept these prayers, we beseech Thee, for the sake of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

II. Written October 17, 1727

Most merciful Father, accept our humblest prayers in behalf of this Thy languishing servant; forgive the sins, the frailties, and infirmities of her life past. Accept the good deeds she hath done in such a manner that, at whatever time Thou shalt please to call her, she may be received into everlasting habitations. Give her grace to continue sincerely thankful to Thee for the many favours Thou hast bestowed upon her, the ability and inclination and practice to do good, and those virtues which have procured the esteem and love of her friends and a most unspotted name in the world. O God, Thou dispensest Thy blessings and Thy punishments as it becometh infinite justice and mercy; and since it was Thy pleasure to afflict her with a long, constant, weakly state of health, make her truly sensible that it was for very wise ends, and was largely made up to her in

other blessings more valuable and less common. Continue to her, O Lord, that firmness and constancy of mind wherewith Thou hast most graciously endowed her, together with that contempt of worldly things and vanities that she has shown in the whole conduct of her life. O All-powerful Being, the least motion of whose will can create or destroy a world, pity us, the mournful friends of Thy distressed servant, who sink under the weight of her present condition, and the fear of losing the most valuable of our friends. Restore her to us, O Lord, if it be Thy gracious will, or inspire us with constancy and resignation to support ourselves under so heavy an affliction. Restore her, O Lord, for the sake of those poor who, by losing her, will be desolate, and those sick who will not only want her bounty, but her care and tending; or else, in Thy mercy, raise up some other in her place with equal disposition and better abilities. Lessen, O Lord, we beseech Thee, her bodily pains, or give her a double strength of mind to support them. And if Thou wilt soon take her to Thyself, turn our thoughts rather upon that felicity which we hope she shall enjoy, than upon that unspeakable loss we shall endure. Let her memory be ever dear unto us, and the example of her many virtues, as far as human infirmity will admit, our constant imitation. Accept, O Lord, these prayers, poured from the very bottom of our hearts, in Thy mercy, and for the merits of our blessed Saviour. Amen.

III. Written November 6, 1727

O merciful Father, who never afflictest Thy children but for their own good, and with justice, over which Thy mercy always prevaileth, either to turn them to repentance, or to punish them in the present life in order to reward them in a better; take pity, we beseech Thee, upon this Thy poor afflicted servant, languishing so long and so grievously under the weight of Thy hand. Give her strength, O Lord, to support her weakness, and patience to endure her pains without repining at Thy correction. Forgive every rash and inconsiderate expression which her anguish may at any time force from her tongue, while her heart continueth in an entire submission to Thy will. Suppress in her, O Lord, all eager desires of life, and lessen her fears of death by inspiring into her an humble yet assured

hope of Thy mercy. Give her a sincere repentance for all her transgressions and omissions, and a firm resolution to pass the remainder of her life in endeavouring to her utmost to observe all Thy precepts. We beseech Thee likewise to compose her thoughts, and preserve to her the use of her memory and reason during the course of her sickness. Give her a true conception of the vanity, folly, and insignificance of all human things, and strengthen her so as to beget in her a sincere love of Thee in the midst of her sufferings. Accept and impute all her good deeds, and forgive her all those offences against Thee which she hath sincerely repented of or through the frailty of memory hath forgot. And now, O Lord, we turn to Thee in behalf of ourselves and the rest of her sorrowful friends. Let not our grief afflict her mind, and thereby have an ill effect on her present distemper. Forgive the sorrow and weakness of those among us who sink under the grief and terror of losing so dear and useful a friend. Accept and pardon our most earnest prayers and wishes for her longer continuance in this evil world, to do what Thou art pleased to call Thy service, and is only her bounden duty, that she may be still a comfort to us and to all others who will want the benefit of her conversation, her advice, her good offices, or her charity. And since Thou hast promised that where two or three are gathered together in Thy name Thou wilt be in the midst of them to grant their request, O gracious Lord, grant to us who are here met in Thy name that those requests, which in the utmost sincerity and earnestness of our hearts we have now made in behalf of this Thy distressed servant and of ourselves, may effectually be answered, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Footnotes:

{1} A clearer style, or a discourse more properly adapted to a public audience, can scarce be framed. Every paragraph is simple, nervous, and intelligible. The threads of each argument are closely connected and logically pursued. - *Orrery*.